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SUBJECT: TAL AFAR WRAP-UP: SHORT-TERM SUCCESS BUT MOMENTUM
MUST BE MAINTAINED

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES DAVID M. SATTERFIELD FOR REASONS 1.4 (a), (b), AND (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Major fighting in Tal Afar has concluded and the reconstruction process is proceeding apace. The operation is considered by MNF-I to be an overall success: an important base for terrorists and insurgents has been disrupted, with a number either killed or detained. The Iraqi Army (IA), supported by Police Commando units of the Ministry of Interior (MOI), played a major and visible role in the operations; by all accounts they performed well. Relief efforts, including bilateral support from Turkey, generally succeeded. Most of those who fled the city have returned. Battle damage to residences and shops was minimal. U.S. forces have paid out nearly \$850,000 in compensation and have started a number of projects to help the city recover and move forward. However, despite these positive points, there were and are important aspects of the operation that needed (and still need) improvement. While the Prime Minister and the Ministers of Defense and Interior publicly played lead roles and put an Iraqi face on the operation, at the levels below them the Iraqis required constant coaching and prodding to formulate and execute plans both during the lead-up to the operation and to deal with humanitarian issues during and after combat operations. Political reconciliation in Tal Afar is critical, and we judge that the Iraqis are moving too slowly in paying promised compensation and in addressing the concerns of the people. It is critical that the tactical success against the insurgents be followed by strategic success at the political level. END SUMMARY.

OPERATION RESTORING RIGHTS

12. (C) The centerpiece of Operation Restoring Rights was a decisive combat operation to dislodge insurgents and foreign fighters reported to have taken over the town of Tal Afar, a city of 250,000 inhabited by an ethnically diverse population of approximately 75 percent Turkmen and 25 percent Arabs and Kurds. Approximately 75 percent are Sunni and the rest are Shia. Ethnic tensions, which have been exacerbated for the past year by the insurgency, have long created difficulties in the town. In September 2004, Coalition Forces (CF) entered the city to dislodge insurgents who were using it as a base of operations. Following the withdrawal of CF, the situation slowly degenerated. As ethnic tensions flared, insurgents took advantage of the opportunity to return to the city -- some invited and sheltered by the Sunni sheiks in an effort to strengthen their hand against Shia rivals. Acts of violence became commonplace, and many Shia left the city to seek shelter elsewhere. The city's once-thriving economy collapsed. The Shia turned to the Iraqi Transitional Government (ITG) for assistance, but when it was slow to come they sought other champions for their cause, including Moqtada al-Sadr.

13. (C) As the situation became more untenable, the decision was made to take military action to defeat the insurgents who had occupied the city. Prior to embarking on military action, attempts were made to solve the problem politically. An ITG delegation visited Tal Afar in an effort to address grievances, to determine whether a negotiated settlement between the rival factions was possible, and to ascertain whether such a settlement would lead to the departure of the insurgents, who were thought to include a number of foreign fighters. These attempts to broker a political deal ultimately failed, and, following a period of preparatory and shaping operations by the U.S. 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment (3ACR) and the 3rd IA Division, decisive combat operations began on September 10. Prior to the commencement of operations the ITG had obtained the agreement of the Sunni tribal sheiks that authorities must resort to military force to free the city from insurgents.

14. (C) In many respects, the decisive combat operations were anticlimactic. Many insurgents were engaged and killed during the shaping operations. Also, despite strong indications that the insurgents were preparing for a defensive battle, by the time the operation commenced many had fled either by blending in with the departing masses (who had been warned to leave by their leaders) or by escaping through a network of tunnels that were discovered after CF and IA soldiers entered the city. In total, according to MNF, the combat operations led to the death of 152

insurgents, the capture of 703, and the discovery of 68 caches. Notably, of all those killed or captured, only two were positively identified as foreign fighters. Coalition and Iraqi casualties between August 26 and September 15 totaled 4 CF killed, 11 CF wounded, 4 ISF killed, and 21 ISF wounded. Only 6 civilians reportedly were killed or wounded during the operation.

15. (C) The performance of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), both IA and MOI commandos, was mostly encouraging. The IA assumed a lead role in the fighting and performed extremely well in combined operations with CF. They sustained casualties and still continued to pursue the enemy aggressively. However, they required more than limited support. With regard to MOI forces, there were allegations that the predominately Shia 4th Special Police Commando Brigade harassed, abused, and stole from Sunni citizens as they fled. Twelve specific allegations were investigated and two were found to be substantiated; the others were not. The Sunni sheiks were upset with the appearance of the Commando Brigade because they believed the ITG had promised to send a more balanced unit instead. The Commando Brigade, which has a dubious reputation among Sunnis, was withdrawn at the earliest possible time to improve the situation and lower tensions. A plan to replace them with Public Order Battalions is currently on hold for the same reason.

HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS

16. (C) During the several months leading up to the operation, an increasing number of people left Tal Afar as economic and security conditions there worsened. The exact number who fled over the months and days preceding the operation is hard to determine, but a reasonable total estimate ranges between 20,000 and 40,000 people. Most of these people sought shelter with relatives or friends in other cities throughout Iraq. Many more fled as shaping operations commenced in the days immediately preceding the assault. Just after the launch of decisive operations, the tribal sheiks encouraged their people to leave. Although there was not an ITG plan for humanitarian assistance, one of the Prime Minister's special assistants headed a team that met frequently in the days prior to the operation to coordinate the efforts of various Iraqi ministries. In addition, the Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MODM) established an operations center to coordinate relief activity, which -- despite being temporarily displaced by a fire -- proved to be highly effective and will serve as a model for future operations.

17. (C) By the time combat operations began, it was estimated that at least 20,000 people had fled the city in the immediately preceding days. Again, many sought and received refuge with other families in the area, but many were sheltered in tents provided by USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), the Iraqi Red Crescent, and other NGOs. OFDA, with its implementing partners International Medical Corps (IMC) and International Organization for Migration (IOM), worked closely with the 3rd ACR and provided assistance to more than 20,000 internally displaced persons. OFDA spent approximately \$1,150,000. (See septel for further information on OFDA accomplishments.) The Turkish Government, which was concerned that the sizeable Turkmen population would not receive its fair share of relief supplies from the Kurds, also offered and delivered aid.

18. (C) Despite initial difficulties in arranging transport for food and other supplies, the Embassy deems the relief operation a success. There were no major problems with widespread hunger or disease. The displacement lasted relatively briefly, and as of September 27 MNF-I reports that more than 21,000 internally displaced persons have returned. They were provided with food and water as they passed through U.S.-manned checkpoints on their way back. None of the local sheiks who were at meetings attended by PolOff on September 27-28 complained of issues regarding health conditions, food, water, or sanitation. The sheiks were encouraging all of their people to return to their homes. The MODM predicts that regular food distribution and city services will resume in approximately one week. Emergency food distribution within Tal Afar has all but ended. Some difficulties were encountered with the Red Crescent. For this reason, POL, IRMO, and OFDA are seeking a meeting with the President of the Iraqi Red Crescent to discuss the importance of adhering to international standards of humanitarian response (especially sanitation) and to urge the Red Crescent to coordinate better with other humanitarian assistance entities in the future.

RECONSTRUCTION ACTIVITIES

19. (C) U.S. forces initiated reconstruction efforts

immediately following the completion of decisive combat operations. MNF-I has funded 58 current projects in Tal Afar, totaling more than \$11 million. These projects address the needs of security, electricity, medical services, water, sanitation, education, transportation, and construction. The scheduled completion date for all projects is March 2006. In addition, MNF-I is compensating Tal Afar residents \$200 to \$2,000 per qualifying family for homes damaged by the operation. By October 1, MNF-I will have paid out over \$850,000 in compensation.

10. (C) In contrast, the ITG has yet to pay a single dinar in compensation, despite continued pledges to do so and continued entreaties by MNF-I and Embassy officers. The ITG initially agreed to make \$50 million available for reconstruction and compensation. The Minister of Defense said that each family would be paid \$1,000, but more recently the Prime Minister's aide for Tal Afar said the ITG would pay each family an initial payment that amounts to \$34. In addition to the promised compensation, the ITG has a "Phase 1" proposal that calls for spending \$47 million (including \$10 million for compensation) during the next 90 days. However, there was no discussion of this plan during a September 27 meeting between the sheiks and the ITG.

11. (C) The reasons for the Iraqi delays appear to be bureaucratic. The office of the Prime Minister (PM) initially tasked the Ministry of Planning and Development (MOPD) to submit a reconstruction plan for Tal Afar, which it quickly did. Subsequently, the Minister of Industry and Minerals (MIM), a Sunni Arab from nearby Mosul who vocally opposed military action, was tasked to implement the plan, in response to complaints from senior ITG Sunni leaders (including Vice President Ghazi al-Yawar and Deputy Prime Minister Abed Mutlaq al-Jiburi) that "Shia" were in charge of Tal Afar reconstruction. The PM's office has advised IRMO that the order has been issued by the PM to allocate \$50 million. However, for reasons unknown to us, the PM's office does not want all the money to go through the MIM. Finally, the Ministry of Finance (MOF), which will ultimately disburse the funds, has written to the Council of Ministers to indicate that it will not do so until it receives certain information, including the number of people killed and injured and the number of homes demolished and destroyed. Since the MOF has not yet received this information or further instructions from the Council, they are not moving the funds.

12. (C) MNF-I and Embassy both believe that unless the ITG quickly begins to fulfill its commitments, the people of Tal Afar will feel betrayed and turn to continued reliance on the MNF-I for assistance. It is crucial that the ITG maintain the momentum and quickly produce tangible results by paying compensation and commencing construction projects. Embassy and MNF-I will continue to press the ITG on this.

POLITICAL OUTCOME AND RECONCILIATION

13. (C) A major reason the situation in Tal Afar deteriorated was the historical animosities and suspicions among the disparate ethnic communities who live there. Sunni Arabs, Shia, Kurds, and Turkmen are all vying for their share (and then some). These problems continue and must be resolved as much as possible if Tal Afar is to move forward. Initially, there was great suspicion on the part of the Sunnis and Turkmen that the Shia were seeking dominance and that the military operation was conducted on a pretext to put down the Sunni and gain power. Upon the commencement of the combat operation, several nationally prominent Sunnis, including members of the Government, spoke out in harsh terms about the situation. Meetings between local sheiks of different sectarian backgrounds, as well as meetings by local, provincial, and national officials, often ended with shouting and walkouts. On a positive note, the majority of the sheiks seemed to be in agreement at the beginning of the operation that force must be used. However, at a meeting one week ago, the Sunni sheiks refused to enter the same room as the Shias.

14. (C) Nonetheless, on September 27, sheiks from all groups met for the first time since the operation. They all agreed that foreign fighters had brought on the problems. Only the chief of police dissented, claiming that 95 percent of the combatants were locals. Distrust and suspicion remains. PM Jaafari recently received a letter from a trusted friend in Tal Afar alleging that atrocities and attacks on Shia homes were still taking place. Minister of Defense Dulime says he's received similar complaints from Sunnis. MNF-I is unable to either confirm or deny these reports.

15. (C) A major source of tension in the city was the composition of the police force, which was perceived to be too Shia. In the months prior to the operation, the chief of police was a Shia who purged the force of all Sunnis and then

began to target members of the Sunni community. The police in Tal Afar began to be perceived as an extension of the Badr Corps, the armed wing of the SCIRI party. The chief was fired by the Provincial Chief of Police but refused to go quietly. When he finally was forced out, he was replaced by a chief who was seen to be effective, impartial, and professional. The new chief eventually was appointed to be the mayor. To further remedy the problems with the police, it was agreed before the operation began that a new police force would be recruited from across Tal Afar's population to reflect the town's diversity. Each sheik was to nominate an equal number of tribesmen to be included in the force. Efforts to reconstitute the force are ongoing, with a majority of the recruits coming from the Sunni community. This process remains controversial as some Turkmen candidates have been disqualified by their failure to meet the requirement that they speak, read, and write Arabic. Other leaders accuse their rivals of nominating "terrorists" to serve in the force. Rigorous vetting procedures will be followed in an attempt to avoid recruiting unsuitable candidates. The recruiting effort is a joint MNF-I and MOI effort. A mobile MOI recruiting team has arrived to sign up additional candidates. An 8-week course for 200 new recruits from all tribes begins on October 3, and a 2-week course for 150 current officers has already begun. CF and IA soldiers, along with a number of the city's existing police officers, are currently providing police protection for Tal Afar.

16. (C) At the national level, ITG leadership took a visible and lead role in the operation. The PM appeared on television to announce and justify the operation. This was followed by several briefings by the Ministers of Defense and Interior in which they strongly defended the need for military action and called for unity against terrorists. The statements and role of the Minister of Defense, who in the past was hesitant to take a public role during military operations against predominantly Sunni insurgents, were particularly positive. The ITG leadership clearly views the Tal Afar operation as a success. Their confidence in participating in necessary military operations has increased along with the capabilities of the ISF.

COMMENT

17. (C) Positives include: insurgents routed, low Coalition and ISF casualties, nearly negligible civilian injuries, minimal battle damage, no major humanitarian problems, and an emboldened Iraqi leadership and military. Negatives include: a low number of foreign fighters confirmed killed or captured, difficulties getting the ITG to execute without constant mentoring, some difficulties coordinating the activities of NGOs during the humanitarian assistance phase, and ITG foot-dragging during the critical reconstruction and reconciliation process. Continued sectarian suspicions and political animosities remain important challenges. Also not to be discounted is the continued presence of insurgents in the area, as demonstrated by the highly unusual use of a female suicide bomber to attack and kill police applicants in Tal Afar on September 28. Post will continue to push the ITG to maintain the momentum so that a short-term victory does not become a long-term loss. END COMMENT.
Satterfield